

# *Wrestling Perspective*

• Analysis and Commentary From The McLaughlin Group of Professional Wrestling •

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## *Running a Successful Promotion: Does Joe Pedicino Know?*

By - David Skolnick

The Global Wrestling Federation's debut on ESPN was far better than any show the USWA, GWF's predecessor, ever showed on the cable sports network. But, the real challenge for Joe Pedicino and his fledging promotion, during the next few weeks and months, is to do better than that; a lot better.

Although hardcores poked fun at Pedicino being called the "fans' man" during his tenure in the NWA, it is nonetheless true. Pedicino obviously cares about what wrestling fans want to see and has said he will cater to those needs.

At this point, the GWF is a distant third behind WCW and the WWF as far as popularity and talent is concerned. However, for a promotion that started a few months ago, it is rather encouraging that it could pass every other small promotion in such a short time. Then again, this is 1991, not 1983. The GWF has proven to be more entertaining and professional than the USWA, IWCCW, UWF and all the other smaller groups in terms of television and talent. Make no mistake about it, Pedicino has some extremely capable people working for him.

Jim Cornette is one of the most talented people in this business. Whether it's managing, announcing or talent coordination, Cornette can do so much for a wrestling promotion. Giving him more responsibilities would only improve the GWF. While he is busy with commitments to the GWF and the LPWA, he is one of the best announcers in wrestling and he is not being utilized by Pedicino in that capacity. This oversight, if corrected, could vastly improve the quality of the Global broadcasts.

Cornette is among the very best. When you talk about the rest of the performers in the promotion, they can be broken down into the good, the bad and the ugly. First the good. Del Wilkes is certainly not a person to build a promotion around, but he is extremely talented. At this point, he is probably the most popular wrestler the company has. He needs work on his interviews and should become more comfortable in the ring with time. Wilkes has a good build, above average skills and while not a main eventer yet, he shows promise. Making him the Television Champion, a secondary belt to the not yet crowned North American Champion, was a good idea.

Another wrestler the promotion can build itself around is Chris Walker. Yes, Walker is green, but he has a lot of charisma and is not that bad of a worker. He too, in time, will prove to be a quality wrestler. In Pedicino's Matwatch interview, he praised Rasta the Voodoomon as a future major heel. Rasta has the look, but virtually no wrestling skills. If Pedicino wants to promote Rasta, he needs to have someone work with him on the fundamentals. But, he is a fresh face that can be developed into a moneymaker.

Before we get to the bad, let's discuss the ugly. Mukhan Singh, Cactus Jack and Rip Rogers are all good heels, but there is a major problem with them. They have all been abused talent in WCW. Rogers and former GWF top heel, Buddy Landell, culminated less than impressive won/loss records during their stints in WCW, while Singh and Jack fared only slightly better. Fans probably perceive the GWF's top heels as WCW rejects and there really isn't much Pedicino and the GWF can do about that. Further, Landell has already been fired for his lack of reliability and Cactus Jack may sign with WCW, thereby reducing the number of charismatic heels available. Other GWF pushed heels include Bill Irwin and the Royal Family. See above for similar problems.

Now the bad, and regrettably there is plenty of bad talent in the GWF. First off, the place is filled with World Class leftovers. Hardly anyone wants to see Brian Adias, Sweet Daddy Falcone, Terry Daniels, Mike Davis and the list goes on from there. Some can argue that Gary Young, Jeff Gaylord and Terry Garvin have some promise, but if the GWF doesn't want to be labeled as a local Texas promotion, they need to find other wrestlers. The GWF should keep some of the talented Texas wrestlers, and try to obtain Chris Adams, but discard the rest.

Most of the other GWF wrestlers came from Pedicino's Georgia All-Star promotion. Again, some are good, such as Billy Black, and some are lousy, such as Nick Busick, who has since signed with the WWF. Understandably, the promotion cannot go out and get top of the line talent and, eventually, the bad will be weeded out. But it is painful to watch some of the weeding out process.

As far as the television program goes, it is the best wrestling show ever to appear on ESPN, save for an ever so occasional hot AWA program. That may not be much of a compliment, but the show does have a professional look. It is probably among the best wrestling programs produced on television today and this is after only a few weeks. The recaps at the beginning of the shows are annoying and the promotion is already repeating its television tournament. Craig Johnson and Scott Hudson have potential, but they do have their problems. They do not know when to let a bad joke die. When Randy Rhodes, who bears a striking resemblance to Dusty Rhodes, wrestling his first match, Hudson made at least half a dozen references to Rhodes looking like someone, but he couldn't figure out who. They also were overbearing when they tried to get over Rogers' hustler gimmick. The jokes became annoying and took away from the match. To the credit of Hudson and Johnson, they both have a great deal of enthusiasm about wrestling and the GWF. With time, they may become one of the best announcing duos in the business. Hudson has the Chris Cruise style of announcing down pat while whoever described Johnson as a cross between Vince McMahon and Hugo Savonovich was correct. Yet, I still don't know what it means. However, adding Cornette would only prove to be beneficial.

The GWF does show a lot of promise. But, they must stop the ongoing storyline concerning the GWF being part of a worldwide company. Also, there are some errors that make WCW seem professional. Only minutes after Iceman Parsons was disqualified in his light heavyweight tournament match for throwing Adrian Street over the top rope, Pedicino said in a news style spot that throwing your opponent over the top rope was not cause for disqualification. Boni Blackstone consistently asks the wrestlers questions that were answered earlier in the show. With time, these problems should be corrected. They have some employees who are hard workers who want this company to succeed. Much like the UWF, it is facing a major challenge. But, unlike Herb Abrahms promotion, the GWF is on a major cable network and is run by a person with an extensive wrestling background. The GWF's biggest asset is Pedicino. He has been in this business for a long time and has a great deal of experience. He is also determined to succeed. After his initial deal to purchase the USWA went sour, he did not give up. Instead, he regrouped and was able to take the USWA's television spots. Pedicino needs to become a bit more aggressive and hire established stars that are not tied down to WCW or the WWF. I agree with his

assessment that his promotion can become successful, but it is going to take time, patience and creativity. The ball is in his court. Now is his chance to show the world Joe Pedicino knows wrestling.

## **Sidelines**

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**Chokehold** is the publication from pro wrestling newsletters self proclaimed, albeit it accurately so, Chicago bad boy Lance LeVine. It's a sort of monthly, but then again not quite, newsletter that looks at wrestling and other important social-political topics with unabashed sarcasm and humor. Lance's publication continues to grow in popularity and is always entertaining. The latest issue had a spoof of our Tommy Young interview and previous issues have had such entertaining features and the Jason Hervey scramble board. Chokehold is available from Lance LeVine for \$1.00 per issue at: 507 West 43rd Place, Chicago, IL 60609. Be forewarned Chokehold is for mature readers and some readers may find some of the material offensive.

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## **Why Pro Wrestling Hates Me**

By - Vic Stanley

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For a variety of reasons, the wrestling business really hates people like me. Perhaps the wrestling industry is justified in not wanting my loyalty as a hardcore fan. They consider me to be akin to the welfare mother who demands a higher quality cheese in the handout line. The business insists upon unconditional adulation, something which I am unwilling to provide. After all, since I no longer contribute to their profit margin, I have no right to negatively comment on their product or their business decisions. On the other hand, if I were a non-paying fan who heaped unending praise upon them in an all "I love wrestling" newsletter, I doubt they would attempt to silence or humiliate me. They might even acknowledge my existence.

As euphoric as that may seem, it simply isn't the case. Below, I have listed a half dozen reasons why the wrestling business loathes me:

1) I write for several underground newsletters, whose very existence is greatly resented by the business. We are all a bunch of leeches, scavengers and malcontents hell bent on ruining the fun for their mainstream audience, The dumber their bread and butter remains, the more money they will draw. We are the flies in the ointment. Without the hardcore fans, their attempts to sell an inferior product would go completely unnoticed. They blame us, as much as anything else, for their sagging profits. In their minds, attempting to pawn off a shoddy, inferior product only confuses the issue with facts.

2) The majority of my articles on wrestling are critical in some way. Wrestling does not appreciate criticism, even when it is constructive. I tend to ridicule that which is ridiculous. Since the whole basic premise of wrestling is rather ridiculous anyway, there is, at times, much to chastise. On the few occasions they actually take a suggestion to heart, they never acknowledge the actual brainchild. No other big business is more reluctant to admit their mistakes. Some fans are unwilling to allow the industry to remain in the stone age. The modern technology of the wrestling business clashes with the archaic ethics. The business resents the fact that we point out this dichotomy to them and demand changes and improvements. They are exasperated that we insist on them conducting themselves as civilized human beings in the board room, if not in the ring. They say we don't understand the business and are know it alls who would flounder if put in their positions, disregarding professional businessmen and administrators already. What should qualify me to be a wrestling executive? A knowledge of the pizza industry? Inheriting a promotion? Maybe that would be appropriate credentials.

3) I don't read any of the Bill Apter magazines or the shameful promotional propaganda magazines. I used to read them, but not anymore. They were insulting even to a totally naive child. Reading total fiction about a sport which is already a work makes no sense to me anymore. The business hates me because I am not contributing to the profits of those publications which are in turn subsidizing the wrestling promotions. I am a scoundrel, even worse, a freeloader.

4) I never attend house shows. I used to, but I don't anymore; at least not the major promotions. In the same regard, I avoid McDonald's and Burger King in favor of the local, family owned restaurants. Maybe the service isn't as fast and the facilities aren't state of the arts, but the food sure is better and the owners value my business. The big boys don't want me at their shows anyway, because I might cheer for the heels, take notes or wear the wrong T-Shirt. They don't appreciate troublemakers like me. Never mind that I used to attend more house shows than most casual fans ever will. They want my money, but they insist that I don't enjoy myself. They prefer their picture perfect house shows to be more like Hitler Youth Rallies than exciting sporting events with enthusiastic fans of differing opinions and allegiances in attendance. At legitimate sporting events, the tension in the crowd is a big part of the experience. At wrestling shows, we are told who to root for, what to buy, what to wear and how to behave. Cheer who they tell you to cheer. Other than that, shut up and don't dare complain about anything or you will be thrown out, blackballed and threatened. How many others sports require canned crowd noise to enhance their telecasts and yet because of the atmosphere they've created, they claim we expose the business.

5) I never pay full price to see PPVs, which are just not worth \$20 to \$35 per shot. I used to, but I don't anymore. Nowadays, PPVs are a round robin among friends who take turns hosting the party. It usually ends up costing me a fraction of the PPV cost and my share of the pizza, not delivered by a fast food chain, and drinks. I wish everybody could do it this way. There are too many PPVs scheduled too closely together, with too many preliminary quality matches, too few decisive finishes and too much hype. They just aren't anything special anymore. I would pay full price for a real quality product, though. I would be willing to pay full price to see Hulk Hogan lose the title by a clean pinfall or even Ric Flair retain his title by a clean pinfall. Both of these scenarios are pipedreams today. PPVs should be historical. It just seems that neither WCW or the WWF are interested in providing something historical because the memory of the wrestling business gets worse everyday. Maybe that's because the whatever angle has just transpired isn't worth remembering.

6) I simply know too much about how things really work. I used to know very little, but now I know more than the average fan. I know about jobbing, bladding, steroids, growth hormones, bookers, convicted felons, sex scandals, blacklisting and in-fighting. Even if I still know little compared to those within the industry, I still know the overall quality of the



sport has deteriorated drastically. It doesn't take a hardcore fan to see that. The business would prefer full grown adults believe everything they see in the ring. Their logic is that the more we love it, the less we should question it and try to understand it. That doesn't make any sense to me. I love the sports, so I try to learn all I can about it as a business and as an entertainment medium. They think it is bad for the business if I have the unmitigated gall to tell somebody what I know about it. However, too many strange things happen within the business itself which expose it to the public as a fraud; particularly when it makes glaring errors regarding continuity, chronologically incorrect title changes and other poorly conditioned and trained athletes defeating other more skilled performers.

I am at the point where the thought of wrestling is much better than the reality of it. I have formed an ideal scenario in my mind of what I would like wrestling to be. It would be a combination of differing world wide styles where the excellent performers would be allowed to excel. It's as simple as that. Although I admit this is naive on my part, I still believe this dream is possible. That's why I continue to write for the newsletters. Maybe someday, when all else fails, the wrestling promoters will decide a quality product will sell. I don't care whether or not they admit that perhaps we have some good ideas, as long as they use the ideas to improve the product. Is it so crazy for me to wish so much for a business that doesn't seem to wish too much for itself?

Will the industry form any logical conclusions about all those things above that I used to buy, but don't buy anymore? Why do they value somebody else's dollar over mine? Is it because I make them work harder to earn my money? Will they ever learn to appreciate me in the same sense that they demand my appreciation? Perhaps it sounds like I have completely soured on wrestling. I really haven't, otherwise I wouldn't bother to spend so much time thinking and writing about it. Do I think my opinion makes a difference in the big picture? I would like to think so. I completely agree with Ed Garea when he speaks of his contempt for the term "smart fan." That's why I have always placed it in quotation marks. I have never personally considered myself to be smarter than other fans. I envy those who can still enjoy it the way I used to as a kid. They're the ones who always get their money's worth at the shows, so who is "smart?"

## Would You Buy a Used Car From These Men?

By - The Phantom of The Ring

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Check the best seller lists at random and you will always find a kind of "How I Made it in Business" tome, usually written by someone who struggled against all odds to obtain his share of the American Dream. In the case of WCW, Jim Herd could write a book on how not to make it since business was not helped by the American Dream, but rather ruined by it.

Consider this scenario: you're the number two wrestling promotion in the country. Your competitor has the lion's share of publicity, marketing everything from dolls to ice cream bars to cheap sunglasses. On the other hand, your merchandise is buried in the parent company's catalog, somewhere between souvenirs for the all-news channel and a mediocre baseball team. No doubt about it, you're at a distinct disadvantage.

But you have a slight chance to turn things around. Your next pay-per-view show is coming up. The last pay-per-view was well received and, on paper, things look good for this one as well. Your champion is going to lose his belt to the young contender, and this should help the young contender immensely. Also, consider that the competition's next pay-per-view is coming up in August. This gives you the advantage of two PPVs in a row and a great chance to steal some of the competition's audience. Your present champion is

one of the most respected men in the business. Though not as popular as the competition's champion, he nonetheless has been good for business and your promotion's reputation has largely been built on his back. The last thing you need right now is to lose his services before he loses the title to the contender. After all, wouldn't that be bad business?

Of course it would. But remember, this is Herd and for him, this is business as usual. All things considered, Herd couldn't sell Evian water in Saudi Arabia. We are talking about a man whose ideal job is Director of Player Personnel for the Cleveland Indians. Imagine, losing your top monster heel and your world champion all in the space of 60 days. If it were me, I'd start looking at my booker.

But then, if I were running WCW, I wouldn't have hired Dusty Rhodes to begin with. Why hire someone who almost ran the business into the ground during his previous tenure? But then I'm not Herd. He and Rhodes symbolize what is exactly wrong with WCW: a businessman with no wrestling experience and a wrestler/booker lacking common sense and business sense. An unbeatable combination if you're a bankruptcy lawyer.

Days before Herd announced WCW could not come to terms on a contract with Ric Flair, they relieved him of the WCW championship. Yet, they talk about newsletters exposing the business. But then, they did something that aroused my suspicions - they wished Flair the best of luck in the future. It's enough to make me believe that somehow this is all a work. Come to think of it, knowing wrestling, I think it is all a work, and, all kidding aside, I do smell a rat.

In fact, I smell several, beginning with Herd and not necessarily ending with Rhodes. Just look at some of his recent business decisions. Another scaffold match on a PPV? Doesn't this guy know when to quit? Or how about the whole series of Desperados videos? If they weren't the most boring, silliest things in a long time, they will certainly do until something sillier comes along. But if you're going to go to all the trouble of numbing your audience with this build up, you shouldn't feature one of your Desperados in a television job as Rhodes did with Black Bart. Of course you could always release Dutch Mantell and Dead Eye Dick.

From what I've been given to understand about the whole "Affair du Flair," that if Flair had agreed to the reported 50 percent pay cut, his post title era role would be primarily to put Dustin Rhodes over. I don't know which is worse, putting over Dustin or going to the WWF and putting over the Warrior. Let it just be said this is one more reason why I am glad I am not in wrestling. Imagine having the former World Champion, the "Wrestler of the 80s," being reduced to a glorified jobber, well before his skills had atrophied, and having to put over the boss' kid.

## Screw It

By - Paul MacArthur

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The Great American Bash '91 was the ultimate antithesis of the Shohei Baba booking philosophy. A scaffold match turned into four men pretending to be overgrown boy scouts playing capture the flag. Managers interfered on several occasions. Referees took bumps. Foreign objects were used. Lumberjacks influenced the finish of a match. Two wrestlers not on the card carried off a participant of a heavily publicized match. Creative finishes were developed to somehow prevent wrestlers from losing their credibility. When the stardust cleared, most every type of screwjob finish Dusty Rhodes had in his arsenal had been depleted in one Pay-Per-View. Resultantly, the most anticipated event every year by hardcore fans received the most decidedly vehement negative reaction in the history of Wrestling Observer Newsletter major event polls.

Screwjobs were not the only factor causing such a negative reaction from the hardcore sector; the wrestling was often substandard. But they were, undoubtedly, the major ones. However, what makes matters worse is WCW, characteristically, hasn't learned from this continual mistake. Rather than assessing the problems within the organization and the booking, WCW has chosen to fault the economy, oversaturation and the newsletter industry for its problems. While there may be merit in each of these claims, the true fault lies within the booking and the constantly shifting directions thereof. The most prevalent problem within the booking regime has been the perpetuation of the screwjob finish. Yet, there are valid reasons for its continued use.

The screwjob can serve several purposes. First, it can be used to build rematches between opponents. If the finish is inconclusive the first time, fans will come back the second and maybe the third time to see the feud resolved. As Dave Meltzer noted, the WWF often used one or two main event screwjobs in a row before finally resolving a feud. In Florida, a program could run 12 weeks with screwjob finishes before it was finally resolved. This was of course during the era of the regions and the monopolistic design, whether artificially created or not of the industry, allowed certain areas to have their own idiosyncrasies unavailable in today's national setting. Thus the Rhodes a la Eddie Grahm finish, once a guaranteed cash cow, has become the source of negative cash flow.

Secondly, the screwjob can be use when the promoter is uncertain how he is going to push a wrestler. There are times when the booker is unsure which direction a wrestler is headed and providing a hot match with a bad ending is often a good way to utilize that wrestler without losing any of his heat or momentum. Today, WCW really has no idea who they intend to push, how far and when, thus the whole promotion has become inconclusive. What should be used sparingly when there is no program set up or when a wrestler is between programs, has become the rule rather than the exception. The result is few wrestlers have any direction, or any heat, because they have no conclusive wins or losses. Every match seems like it is hammock between programs.

Finally, the screwjob can be used to save heat for a wrestler. This too, should be used sparingly as noted above, with no conclusive wins or losses a wrestler loses his popularity. However, there are times when the next program for a wrestler would not allow him to take a clean pinfall loss. In this situation, it is best to move out of a program with the screwjob. But, it must never be used in the main event situation, as that program must, at some point, have a conclusive winner and loser. Otherwise, the program was served as a holding pattern and should have been relegated to the undercard. A wrestler worthy of a main event should be able retain his heat after coming out of the program on the losing side. However, the theory of utilizing Ric Flair as the champion who never wins, has not only reduced his credibility and drawing power, but has done little for his opponents. In fact, the excessive use of the screwjob in main events has caused an apathetic attitude towards the main event, resulting in low attendance, television ratings and pay-per-view buy rates.

Somehow, that point, like many others, has been missed by WCW. The screwjob is a tool that can and should be used at times to perpetuate feuds, maintain heat and serve as agreeable endings to matches early on in the card. Instead, the Great American Bash turned into a show of screwjobs and the reaction was adamantly negative. This begs the question: why? If the screwjob can serve a purpose, and it certainly does, then why the vehement negative reactions to a card full of them? The answer is rather so apparent that it makes one wonder why WCW is unable to see it.

A screwjob is the antithesis of a conclusive finish. The premise of the screwjob is to prevent any conclusions be drawn about the superiority of either wrestler. Instead, it continues to perpetuate the image that the wrestlers are still evenly matched. There is nothing wrong with presenting this image for a period of time as long it is finally decided. The decision is when to have a feud conclude. The answer is on the PPVs. When fans

pay to see a wrestling program, they expect quality entertainment and this necessitates conclusive finishes. People do not attend plays without endings. Nor do they attend operas without seeing the last act. In fact, the only reason people leave sporting events early is because the event has lasted too long or the victor was decided before the game was over. In wrestling, for some reason, the bookers believe they are above every form of sport or entertainment, maybe because wrestling exists as an unusual hybrid of the two. The result is wrestling, by and large, has failed to deliver satisfactory conclusions to the programs presented. Much like the almost great movie whose ending left much to desired, the screwjob finish has left a bad taste in the wrestling audience's mouths. If for no other reason, than because it has been force feed for so long, the thought of it has become repulsive. When one is repulsed, one avoids the offending source. WCW's attendance is the ultimate proof of this theory.

The contrapuntal school of thought is of course that taught by Baba. Clean finishes from the top to the bottom of the card. The booking often serves a purpose and there are attempts to keep a wrestler's heat after the clean loss. The talent of the wrestlers and the loyalty of the audience are also contributing factors to Baba's success, but the true turnaround in his promotion occurred after he instituted the policy of clean finishes. I am not a Japanese purist, nor due I believe a completely Japanese styled wrestling promotion could be successful in the U.S., at least not for several years. However, bringing in elements of Japanese wrestling, in particular the concept of conclusive finishes, would only enhance the U.S. wrestling product mix. Then, in time, the screwjob could be used sparingly, as it should be, and would not be a major problem. Indeed, it just might be called a creative finish.

Instead of alleviating the screwjob, WCW is determined to present as many of them as it can per evening. Perhaps they think they are deceiving the fans and are therefore clever as they laugh all the way to the bank. Judging by the latest gate figures, WCW's attempts to be deceptive have failed miserably. The fans have spoken, but as is customary for WCW, they will not listen to what their fans want, to their television ratings, to their attendance figures or to their PPV buy rates. Rather they'll continue to live in their illusionary playground hoping someday the conclusions about them will become as inconclusive as their matches. The truth is, the conclusions have been made and they are as clean as WCW's finishes.

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